

“Music Hath Charms……” Psalm 98, Psalm 149:1-6a, Psalm 33:1-12 6-19-05

This is one of those interesting mornings in the life of a church when we take off in a direction that is a bit removed from our usual direction. For some this can be a little disturbing, while for others it can be very freeing. Every now and then we wander from the well-worn pathway of the lectionary to travel a little topical ground. This morning we are going to take a look at music and consider how it enriches and informs our worship of God and our very lives.

Parts of this meditation will be light and frothy, forgive me my missteps. As of this moment in time, none of it will be sung although we tread on shaky ground when I am led into music. I often think in music, strange as that may seem, and those who know me best know I can put almost anything into a song. This morning I will exercise extreme control.

Just in case you haven't noticed, every piece of music in our order of worship, except for the Gloria and Doxology, has been composed by Felix Mendelssohn. The choir has been working very hard on the pieces they shared with us with the help of Peggy and, being the cooperative soul I can sometimes be, I went right along and sought every bit of music in our hymnal credited to Mendelssohn. “Hark, the Herald Angels” might seem a little out of season, but the music is his and so we will sing it.

Mendelssohn was a composer of romantic music. He led a charmed but very brief life, dying at the age of 38. He was married happily, and, though he was not the father of any children, on this Father's Day, it is good to note that he did father much beautiful music.

He was a child prodigy and wrote the “Octet for Strings” at the age of 16 and the “Overture to a Midsummer Night's Dream” when he was only 17. He had been composing since he was twelve and possibly even at an earlier age. One of his goals in life was to restore the “neglected music of Bach to the world” and the other was to found a great conservatory. He did both before he died at a young age.

So, how does this speak to us as a worshiping community? Well, Mendelssohn did write lovely music that is still used in our churches. Just as did the early Hebrews when they penned the Psalms—the songbook of our Bible. The Psalms were meant to reach to heights higher than their writers' understanding. They were meant to bring heaven and earth together and to help us all understand that music speaks to us in many different ways. The goal of most great composers has been the same.

“Music hath charms, to soothe the savage breast, To soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak.” This sentiment is as true today as it was when William Congreve wrote those words in his play *The Mourning Bride* in 1697.

Our Psalms preceded Congreve's expression of the value of music by many years. They express a variety of emotions and struggles in life. There are Psalms of lament and Psalms of thanksgiving, processional and recessional Psalms, there are Psalms of joy and Psalms of despair or lament.

If we ever pause long enough to give the music that surrounds us on every front in our world, some thought, we will find that the same expressions of human need and despair, fiery passion and nostalgic thought exist from the lines of the Psalms through the finest of Beethoven and Mozart and Bach through my favorite songs of Broadway into popular music and country western.

How can anyone argue with the pain felt in that old classic, “I’ve got tears in my ears from lying on my back crying over you?” A personal lament, if I have ever heard one.

Although in recent years things seem to have gone a bit astray, we can always hum along to “Eleanor Rigby” and think of “all the lonely people, where do they all come from, all the lonely people, where they all belong.” Another lament—one of community.

We can rejoice in the changing of the seasons with “The Four Seasons” by Vivaldi, or perhaps, on a lighter note smile as we sing “Tra-laa it’s May the lusty month of May...” Or reflect on:

If ever I would leave you,
it wouldn't be in summer.
Seeing you in summer,
I never could go.

Your hair streaked with sunlight,
Your lips red as flame,
Your face with a luster
that puts gold to shame.

But if I'd ever leave you,
it couldn't be in Autumn
How I'd leave in Autumn,
I never will know.

I've seen how you sparkle,
When Fall nips the air.
I know you in Autumn,
and I must be there.

And could I leave you running
merrily through the snow,
Or on a wintry evening
when you catch the fire's glow.

If ever I would leave you,
how could it be in springtime?
Knowing how in spring,
I'm bewitched by you so.

Oh, no, not in springtime
Summer, Winter or Fall;
No never could I leave you, at all.

Then there is love. We all know you “Can’t, buy me love” a possible lament. and that “Love Makes the World go Round,” a song of thanksgiving and that at times, although rarer and rarer in our day and age, “Love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage..” There also is “The song of love is a sad song, hi Lily, hi Lily hi low.” Yet, another lament.

But, I feel I may digress. Music is in all our beings whether we can sing or not. It has been built into us: the joyful tones and those that are sad and wistful, those of passion and those of peaceful reflection; those found in our pages of scripture from our Psalms to the hymn sung as Jesus went out to the Mount of Olives; those in our concert halls and opera houses and on our DVDs.

Music can be one of our finest expressions of the love and joy, reflection and prayerfulness God has granted us. It stirs us to become the creative beings he wants us to be. We may not all be a Mendelssohn or a King David or a Beatle, but we are the children of a God who loves us and rejoices to hear us sing. Amen